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S E R M O N

PREACHED IN

M I L T O N

ON THE MORNING, AND AT

D O R C H E S T E R

IN THE AFTERNOON OF THE 9th OF MAY, 1798;

BEING THE DAY

Recommended by the PRESIDENT of

THE UNITED STATES FOR

SOLEMN HUMILIATION, FASTING, AND PRAYER

THROUGHOUT THE UNION,

By THADEUS MASON HARRIS,

Minister of the Religious Society in *Dorchester*.

“Laissons toutes les avenues libres à ceux qui nous
conseillent de bien faire.”

Boston :

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1798.



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FOR
THE HONEST AVOWAL
OF
SENTIMENTS
ARDENT IN THE CAUSE
OF
HIS COUNTRY
WHICH THIS SERMON DISPLAYS,
THE AUTHOR
SOLICITS
THE RENEWED INDULGENCE AND CANDOR
OF THOSE
WHO *urged* THE PUBLICATION.

“ REMEMBER, O my Friends ! the laws, the rights,
The generous plan of power delivered down
From age to age, by your renowned forefathers ;
So dearly bought, the price of so much blood !
O let it never perish in your hands !
But piously transmit it to your children.
Do thou, great Liberty, inspire our souls,
And make our lives in thy possession happy ;
Or our deaths glorious in thy just defence !”

ADDISON.

——“ HE who contends for freedom
Can ne’er be justly deem’d his Country’s foe :
No, ’tis the wretch that tempts him to subvert it,—
The soothing slave, the traitor in the bosom,
Who best deserves that name : he is a worm
That eats out all the happiness of nations.”

THOMPSON.

A
S E R M O N
O N T H E
P U B L I C F A S T,

MAY 9, 1798.

II KINGS, xix. 14.

*“AND HEZEKIAH RECEIVED THE LETTER BY THE HAND
OF THE MESSENGERS, AND READ IT; AND HEZEKIAH
WENT UP TO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD AND
SPREAD IT BEFORE THE LORD.”*

THE reading of these words must at once refer you to the pious conduct of our excellent PRESIDENT, whose proclamation assigns the solemn exercises of this day. Devoutly impressed with this truth, that “the safety and prosperity of nations ultimately and essentially depend on the protection and blessing of Almighty GOD;”—assured that “the

~~national acknowledgment of this truth is~~
not only a duty which the people owe to him, but a duty whose natural influence is favorable to the promotion of that morality and piety, without which, social happiness cannot subsist, nor the blessings of a free government be enjoyed ; and that this duty, at all times incumbent, is so especially in seasons of difficulty or of danger, when existing or threatening calamities, the just judgments of GOD against prevalent iniquity, are a loud call to repentance and reformation"—he recommends to us, under the present critical and alarming situation of the United States, humbly and earnestly to implore the Divine mercy and benediction, council and assistance. Every pious heart will accord with his proposal ; every true lover of his country will engage in its fulfilment. For this, my fellow Christians and citizens we now assemble in the house of GOD—for this we have just united in zealous and humble application to the throne of grace ; and to strengthen these religious and patriotic sentiments is my design in the few remarks I propose to make on the passage of scripture just read to you.

I SHALL first briefly narrate the *history* with which it is connected ;* and then make those honest reflections which the subject and the occasion suggest. I shall make them with *freedom*, for I am an AMERICAN ; with *sincerity*, for I am a CHRISTIAN. I have no interest to serve, and no party to advocate, but that of my country and of my religion.

I. THE person, whose pious conduct attracts our observation in the passage selected for our text, was Hezekiah king of Judah. He began the administration of his government by the most commendable zeal for the *true religion*. Truly religious and devout, he was not satisfied with the mere reformation of prevailing corruptions, the abolition of idolatry, and the regulation of the ceremonials of public worship ; but he enjoined the entire submission of the affections and conduct to that Supreme Being who is the moral governor of the universe, and under whose favorable providence alone, nations and individuals are prosperous and happy. He appointed a public celebration of the passover. This solemn anniversary feast was

* See 2 Kings xviii, and xix chapters : 2 Chron. xxix, xxx, xxxi and xxxii ; and Isaiah xxxvi and xxxvii.

kept in grateful acknowledgment of their recovered freedom from the bondage of Egypt. It was calculated to cherish a perpetual sense of their obligations to their divine deliverer, and to excite a perpetual detestation of slavery. For several years its observance had been neglected. Hezekiah issued a proclamation recommending its renewal ; and solicited the concurrence of all the tribes. Though infidelity was prevalent in the land, and some even ridiculed the proclamation,* yet there was still a great majority who obeyed the summons, and assisted at the solemnity. Their religious services were accepted ; their humiliation and repentance met the divine mercy. “ The priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people : and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven.”† Hezekiah proceeded to renew the service of the temple, according to the original institution ; and to provide for the honorable maintenance of the priesthood ; both of which have an immediate reference to national virtue, respectability, and happiness. Judah was once

* 2 Chron. xxx. 10.

† 2 Chron. xxx. 26.

more in an honorable and prosperous condition. Recovering and cherishing the sense of their national freedom, and spurning the influence of any foreign domination, the people began to cherish a sentiment of liberty, and to enjoy advantages of prosperity and peace which they had not experienced for many years. "So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem."*

HEZEKIAH seemed fully sensible that RELIGION *is the glory of* RULERS, *and the strength of their* GOVERNMENT. His zeal and piety furnish a lesson to ALL *magistrates*, that their first care should be to stem the torrent of profaneness and impiety, and to propagate true religion, to which they ought to contribute both by authority and example. This will be a certain way to secure the blessing of God both to their selves and the people.

"Thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the Lord. And in every work that he began, (for religion and

for the state) he did it with all his heart and prospered.”*

SUCH was the king whom Sennacherib proposed to dispossess. Elated with the success of his arms, against Samaria and other kingdoms, vain of his power and aiming at universal conquest, he thought with the same ease to subdue the tribes of Israel and their GOD, as he had other countries and their idols.

UNJUST rulers always seek for some specious pretext to colour their proceedings. Sennacherib took for *his*, the neglect of Hezekiah to pay the tribute which had been exacted of Ahaz his predecessor.† This conduct was reproached as a violation of a public and just treaty;‡ but that it was justifiable, is evident. Hezekiah, who had so distinguished his self by a regard to morality and religion, would not dishonor that character by a flagrant act of injustice. He would fear, too, the disaffection of his peo-

* 2 Chron. xxxi. 20, 21. Compare 2 Kings, xviii. 3—8.

† 2 Kings, xviii, 7.

‡ —“ Sennacherib—lui reprochoit d’avoir violé une Traité public et legitime.”

ple, the reproaches of the prophets, and the chastisements of Heaven. It does not appear that Isaiah condemns this procedure ; and sacred history mentions it, immediately after, as a trait of his patriotism and piety. And, as the original exaction was by compulsion; and the present demand unreasonable, we infer the fairness of *his* conduct in refusing submission, and the injustice of Sennacherib in threatening an invasion.*

* “ Pour décider cette question d’une manière précise, il faudroit savoir au juste comment Achaz s’étoit engagé à Tiglah-Pilezer ; s’il n’avoit pas abusé des circonstances fâcheuses où Achaz se trouvoit alors pour lui imposer un tribut exorbitant ; et s’il avoit observé toutes les conditions requises dans le traité ? — Mais il semble qu’il y avoit eu de la violence de la part du roi d’Assyrie, et qu’il avoit soumis Achaz et son Royaume à un joug rude parce qu’il voioit qu’on avoit besoin de son secours. Car, enfin, le service qu’il rendit à Achaz n’étoit pas assez considérable pour vouloir l’engager à être son vassal à perpétuité.”

SAURIN, *disc. historiques*, xiii. vol. 6.

[TRANSLATED.]

Precisely to decide this question, one should know justly upon what principles Achaz had made the engagement with Tiglah Pilezer ; whether he had not taken advantage of the straitened circumstances in which he found the Israelites, with a design afterwards to render them tributary ; and whether he had observed all the conditions of the treaty ? But it seems that there had been some instances of violence on the part of the king of Assyria, and that he had brought the Israelites under a severe yoke because he saw they had need of his succours. Yet, really, the service which he had rendered them was not so considerable as to make it their duty to become his perpetual vassals.

(It will be remembered that this treaty was made in consequence of the assistance afforded Ahaz against the Syrians by whom he was invaded. Tiglah Pilezer sent him forces, and enabled him to subdue them.) 2 Kings, xvi. 7—10.

HEZEKIAH, fearing the worst, put his self in a posture of defence. He made all prudent preparations for the security of the nation. He fortified Jerusalem ; laid in a great store of arms and provisions for the siege ; “ Caused all the people to be enrolled and marshalled for the war that were fit and able for it, placing over them captains of experience to instruct them in all military exercises, and to conduct and lead them forth against the enemy whenever there should be occasion for it ;”^{*} and he took care also to cut off, as much as possible, all supply of water from the enemy. But still, wishing to escape the horrors of an open and disadvantageous war, and solicitous to preserve the prosperity to which the nation had advanced, he sent envoys to propose terms of accommodation with the Assyrians ; to remove, if possible, all misunderstanding ; to settle all existing difficulties ; and to restore harmony and peace. Sennacherib required of them, as the conditions of present negociation, the sum of three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold ;† amounting to about one million five hundred and

^{*} Shuckford, vol. 1, p. 22, and 2 Chron. xxxii. 6, 7.

† 2 Kings, xviii. 14, 31. Compare Isa. xxxvi. 16.

sixty dollars, of our money : * and a promise of farther tributary aid as he should need or require. Hezekiah conceded to the unreasonable requisition : but, to pay the enormous sum demanded, he was obliged to exhaust his treasuries, to take away the gold and silver vessels of the temple, and even to strip that sacred house of the very ornaments which his own piety had consecrated. We may presume that he took this measure inconsiderately and unadvisedly ; and not presumptuously as Ahaz had done before him : † but certainly it was a very wrong one, for “ the captain of the Lord’s inheritance ” to have recourse to ; ‡ nor did it go long unchastised. The respite he had so dearly bought lasted but a little time : For the treacherous Assyrian, having received the money, the loss of which, he saw, disqualified Hezekiah for war, in total disregard of the compact they had just made, and in direct violation of the law of nature and nations, (after an unsuccessful descent upon Egypt,) sent three of his principal officers—Tartan,

* Brerewood de ponder. et pret. vet. num. c. 5.

† 2 Chron. xviii. 21.

‡ Grotius, in loc.

Rabfarris and Rabshakeh,* from Lachish to demand of him the immediate surrender of his capital. Hezekiah appointed three special ambassadors, (Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah†) to hold a conference with them without the city. Rabshakeh, more expert in haranguing than his con-deputies, made a speech, insulting and reviling the government and religion of Judea, and bloated with the pride, false politics and impiety of his own nation.‡

As he spoke very loud, and in the Hebrew tongue, the commissioners (apprehending

* These are not the proper names of men, but denote their employments and offices. *Tartan*, signifies the president of the council; *Rabfarris*, the chief eunuch; and *Rabshakeh*, the principal cup bearer, or chamberlain.

See CALMET's dictionary.

† *Eliakim*, was high steward; *Shebna*, secretary of state; and *Joah*, master of requests.

See VATABLUS.

‡ Rab-fake, plus expert a haranguer que les con-députés, et plus habile à parler la langue des Hebreux, fit un discours à haute voix, ou l'on appercevoit des traits de l'orgueil, de la fausse politique, et de l'impieété de son monarque Sennacherib."

JEROM, PROCOPIUS, VITRINGA, and others, have produced reasons to prove that this chief spokesman had been formerly a Jewish Priest; but had apostatized from his religion in order to get a place in the administration under the Assyrian anti-theocracy.

From the fluency with which he spoke Hebrew it is at least apparent that he had travelled into Judea.

that the people, who had collected on the wall to observe what passed, might hear and be intimidated by the discourse) demanded that he would speak in the Syrian language which they understood very well,* and not in the Jew's language, which the people would overhear. But to influence and intimidate the common people, and to impair their confidence in their rulers,† appeared to be his object; and he replied more vehemently and loudly: “¿ Hath my master sent me to thy master and to thee to speak these words? ¿ hath he not sent me to the men that sit on the wall?” that is, “our business is with the people, and not with the government.” Upon which he expressly addressed the people; endeavoured to excite in them a dislike to the person, and a distrust in the administration of their chief magistrate, telling them that he had deceived them,‡ that the hope he encouraged of divine help would avail them nothing; that, instead of hearkening to him, they had better discard him;

* “The Syrian language was then, says Dr. Gill, [on Isaiah xxxvi. 11.] common in all courts as the French is now; and was learned for the sake of negotiation or commerce.”

† 2 Chron. xxxii. 18.

‡ Isai. xxxvi. 14.

and, (repeating his demand for more money*) advises them to join them in a common cause, encouraged by the promise of enjoying greater liberty and prosperity : though (as Dr. Gill shrewdly remarks) “ he does not tell them how long they should enjoy them.” Nay he even betrays the intended purposes of this proposed alliance. “ Ye shall eat every one of his own vine and every one of his own fig tree, and drink every one the waters of his own cistern.” Happy liberty and equality ! but mark what follows ; “ until I come and take you to a land like your own.” So they must be expatriated, and their own country, perhaps, divided or sold amongst their conquerors ! Lastly he proposes to them to make an agreement with him by a present,† and concludes by bidding them beware lest Hezekiah should persuade them to trust in the Lord, to stand up in their own defence, or not to listen to *his* proposals.

* “ O Cives, Cives, quærenda pecunia primum est !
Fœdera, leges, libertas, virtus, post nummos.”

† Isai. xxxvi. 16.—“ A most insolent and unrighteous demand this, (says Dr. Gill) when he had already received three hundred talents of silver and thirty of gold to withdraw his army.”

As Rabshakeh was a very eloquent man, the envoys of Hezekiah had great reason to dread the effect of his plausible arguments on the people of Judah, especially as they had on several occasions shewn but too little confidence in their own leaders or respect for their own government, and had been repeatedly seduced by foreign influence and enslaved by foreign power. But the good conduct of their excellent sovereign, in whose wisdom and prudence they fully confided, and the revived influence of religious principles, had produced such happy effects upon their minds, that they listened to these vain boastings with silent indignation. So far from disaffecting them with the government under which they were happily placed, or creating the least disunion, they served rather to increase their love to their country, their ruler, and their religion.

THE Jewish envoys following the instructions of the embassy* made no rejoinder to the remonstrance of the Assyrians : but returned to Hezekiah to acquaint him with the disappointment of their mission. He sent to the prophet Isaiah to ask that counsel of the Lord which so critical and alarm-

* Isai. xxxvi. 21.

ing a juncture demanded : and received in return that encouragement which his attachment to religion and the welfare of his country merited.

IN the mean while Sennacherib raised the siege of Lachish and invested Libnah. Here it was that he received intelligence that his country was invaded by a new and formidable foe ; Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia : to attack whom, he quitted his project against Hezekiah : but first sent him a letter in which his threats and invectives were repeated against the nation and the religion of the Jews. Menaces, by the way, of which his own death, by the hands of his sons, and a consequent revolution in the government, prevented the execution.

HEZEKIAH, having read the letter, went into the temple ; and, spreading it before the Lord, prayed for his counsel, assistance and support ; and humbly and devoutly referred the cause to him. This behavior was very befitting the occasion, and displays his piety in a most pleasing point of view. His prayer was perfectly agreeable to the divine will : and Isaiah was commissioned to comfort him immediately with an assurance of the Lord's approbation and protection.

THIS, my hearers, is the simple narrative of facts which stand connected with our text. It is a mirror in which we behold our own country, its present circumstances, and foreign relations. Throughout we see the manly firmness, the patriotism, and the piety of Hezekiah. The sequel shews the wonderful interposition of the DEITY in defence of his injured people and character against those who disregarded them. And the whole serves to recommend to us an imitation of the example of the good king of Judah recorded in our text : that of looking to GOD in every emergency which threatens our national peace, or endangers directly or indirectly our civil or religious privileges.

WE acknowledge that as GOD is the creator, so he is the governor of the world ; that his Providence extends to all things and persons in it ; and that all events are under his direction and subject to his control. Hence the propriety of seeking to him, on this critical juncture of our public affairs, for “ that wisdom which is profitable to direct ” our councils, and for that assistance which is effectual to secure our peace.

EVERY thing, indeed, wears an unpromising, but, I trust in GOD, not a desperate aspect. If we are but united and firm, wise

and virtuous, we may still be invincible and secure, free and happy. Fortunately independent on every nation on earth, it becomes to be wholly superior to foreign predilection and influence. Laying aside all party spirit, personal animosities, and groundless jealousies, we ought to yield to the conciliating influences of a generous confidence in our government ; and seriously consider the important subject of our common welfare. Warmly attached to our own country, let its interests, its glory, its prosperity and its peace, be the objects of our prime concern ; and to advance and perpetuate them, the exertion of our best endeavours. In its fate is involved that of every citizen. We must stand or fall with the constitution.

¿SHALL the duration of our liberty be measured by the lives of those who procured it ? ¿ shall they even survive it ? Twenty two years have not yet elapsed since we claimed INDEPENDENCE, and now we see its spirit declining. Alas ! ¿ must the heroes, the patriots, who purchased the boon with the expense of their fortune and at the hazard of their lives, see us negligent of the prize, or weakly surrender the privilege ! No. Let us pledge ourselves as true AMERICANS to cherish and maintain, next to our religion, the genuine spirit of republican freedom,

Nothing shall weaken our concern for the public weal. We will never give up our invaluable rights and privileges. We will never betray a timidity, a meaness, or a humiliation unworthy the character of a brave, a spirited, and a free people. On the present alarming crisis, which calls for the *entire unanimity* of all ranks and orders of the people to give weight, strength, and efficiency to our government, we will discover our full confidence in the wisdom and integrity of our rulers, our warm and unequivocal approbation of the wise and temperate system which they have hitherto pursued with regard to foreign nations, and our readiness to concur and co-operate with every measure they may find it necessary to adopt for preserving the CONSTITUTION, FREEDOM, and INDEPENDENCE *of the* UNITED STATES.

VENERATION for the memory of our pious ancestors, gratitude for the struggles of our brave soldiers in the late successful contest for liberty, our duty to posterity, zeal for the public good, the great principles of self preservation; all justify decent and prudent measures for security and self defence : and all forbid us to become tributaries or dependants on any foreign power. If nothing but prostration of our national character, or relinquishment of our national independence,

will suffice ;—if these be the terms of negotiation or the price of peace ; and if our reluctance or denial be resented by a declaration of war, our last resource must be with a solemn appeal to GOD for the justice of our cause to vindicate the honor of our country and Religion, at every hazard ; confidently trusting in Heaven for assistance and success.

LET us first devoutly intreat the Almighty Being, who was the GOD of our fathers, and has been signally *our* deliverer and friend, still eminently to bless us in the continued enjoyment of our civil and religious privileges, our national prosperity and peace : and to give the much desired issue, the most happy success to the conciliatory and pacific measures proposed by our government in the present negotiation in Europe.

AND oh may he look down in mercy on his frail and degenerate creature man ! put an end to those delusions which dishonor *his* character and debase *our's* ; subdue that spirit of pride and contention which lays waste his works and distresses his children ; and speedily extend the blessings of PEACE, FREEDOM, and PURE RELIGION, to all the nations of the earth ! And let all the people say, Amen.

